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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES


26 February 1952

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. Allan Evans, OIR
Colonel B. B. Talley, G-2
Captain Ray Malpass, ONI
Colonel Edward H. Porter, AFOIN
Colonel S. M. Lansing, JIG

SUBJECT : SE-22: Consequences of Certain Possible US
Courses of Action with Respect to Indochina,
Burma, or Thailand

1. The attached draft estimate is forwarded for review.
2. It is requested that your representative be prepared to meet with us at 9:30 Wednesday, 27 February, in Room 146 South Building, to discuss this estimate.

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Acting Executive Secretary

Distribution "B"

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

25 February 1952

SUBJECT: SE-22: CONSEQUENCES OF CERTAIN POSSIBLE US COURSES OF ACTION WITH RESPECT TO INDOCHINA, BURMA, OR THAILAND

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the consequences of certain possible US courses of action with respect to an identifiable Chinese Communist military intervention* in Indochina, Burma, or Thailand.

ASSUMPTION

The United Kingdom, France, Australia and New Zealand will join the United States in warning Communist China that the five powers will meet Chinese Communist military intervention in Southeast Asia with military counteraction.

* The term "identifiable Chinese Communist military intervention" is intended to cover either an open and acknowledged military intervention or an unacknowledged military intervention of such a scale and nature that its existence could be demonstrated.

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ESTIMATE

I. THE EFFECT OF A JOINT WARNING

On Communist Intentions

1. We estimate that the Chinese Communists do not intend to launch an early "identifiable military intervention" in Southeast Asia. We do not believe that a joint warning against such an intervention would tend to provoke it. If, contrary to our estimate, the Chinese Communists do contemplate an early "identifiable military intervention" in Southeast Asia, or if in the future they should contemplate such an intervention, a joint warning by the five powers would tend to deter them.

2. Even in the absence of a joint formal warning, the Chinese Communists probably estimate that "identifiable military intervention" in Southeast Asia would entail substantial risk of joint military counteraction, and that such a risk is unnecessary in view of the prospects for achieving Communist control over Southeast Asia without such intervention. They may, however, discount this risk in view of known or supposed differences in policy among the five powers and of possible doubt whether prompt and effective military counteraction is within their capabilities.

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3. The effectiveness of a joint warning as a deterrent would depend in large measure on Communist conviction that:
- a. The five powers were not bluffing, and were united among themselves as to the military counteraction to be taken.
 - b. The five powers were actually capable of prompt and effective military counteraction.
 - c. The counteraction would be directed against Communist China itself as well as toward repelling the Chinese Communist intervention.

4. If the Chinese Communists were convinced on the foregoing points they would have to recognize that intervention in Southeast Asia would bring military counteraction, the probable consequences of which would be general war in the Far East, if not global war. It is improbable, therefore, that they would initiate an "identifiable military intervention" in Indochina, Burma, or Thailand in the face of a joint warning by the five powers unless, on the basis of global considerations, they were willing to accept global war or at least general war in the Far East. So far both Communist China and the USSR have shown a desire to localize the hostilities in Korea, Indochina, Burma, and Malaya. Furthermore, the favorable prospects for the success

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of present Communist tactics in Southeast Asia make probable a continuation of these tactics, unless global considerations impel the USSR and the Chinese Communists to accept grave risk of global war.

5. India, whose adherence might have a profound effect on Communist China, would almost certainly refuse to participate. It is improbable that Japan would wish to take such a provocative step at this time and uncertain whether Thailand would wish to do so. Few, if any, non-Asiatic governments would be willing to join in a formal warning.

6. It is unlikely that whatever additional signatories that could be obtained would increase the effectiveness of a joint warning. Even if the Philippines, Japan and Thailand did participate the Communists would discount their adherence because of the military weakness of these countries and their existing ties with the West. The Communists would assume Chinese Nationalist support of the warning, whether or not explicitly expressed.

Other Effects

7. A joint warning would considerably increase the morale of the Thai and Vietnamese governments and might increase the

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will of the Vietnamese people to continue resistance to the Viet Minh. In Burma any encouragement derived from the warning would probably be offset by fear of involvement in a conflict between the great powers and general suspicion of Western "imperialist" motives.

8. Elsewhere in East and South Asia the effect would be mixed. There would be a tendency, notably in Japan and the Philippines, and to some extent even in India, to applaud this new manifestation of Western determination to check Communist aggression. On the other hand, the feeling would be widespread, especially in India and Indonesia, that the warning represented another instance of Western meddling in Asian affairs and another indication of Western willingness to sacrifice the lives of millions of Asians in pursuit of colonial objectives. This reaction might have a serious adverse effect on popular and governmental attitudes if use of atomic weapons was threatened in the warning.

9. The effect of a warning on other countries would probably not be of major importance. A warning might well revive the fears in the smaller NATO powers regarding the dangers of general war or of an over-extension of Western strength in the Far East, but it is unlikely that the basic attitudes of these countries would be changed.

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II. POSITION OF THE UN IN THE EVENT OF IDENTIFIABLE COMMUNIST
MILITARY INTERVENTION IN INDOCHINA, BURMA, OR THAILAND

10. If identifiable Chinese Communist military intervention in Southeast Asia actually took place, the UN could probably be led to adopt countermeasures similar to those taken regarding Korea if the US, UK and France advocated these measures. Action by the Security Council would certainly be blocked by a Soviet veto, but the matter could then be taken to the General Assembly within twenty-four hours under the "Uniting for Peace" resolution. The General Assembly would probably begin by calling for a cease-fire. Were this action to be ignored (as it presumably would be), a two-thirds majority could probably be mustered for resolutions condemning Communist China as an aggressor, recommending military counteraction to repel the aggression, and setting up a unified military command (though not necessarily under the US) to that end. Most UN members, however, because of their fears of a general war, would probably not be willing to give specific authorization for retaliatory military action against Communist China itself.

11. The willingness of the UN to adopt a stand against Communist intervention in Southeast Asia would be contingent on the readiness of the victim to appeal to the UN. Indochina and Thailand would almost certainly be prompt in seeking UN assistance against Chinese Communist military intervention, but there is some danger that Burma might fail to make a timely appeal.

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12. The degree of UN support for action against Chinese Communist aggression would hinge on various other factors. There would probably be a large number of Arab and Asian abstentions if the victim were Indochina, which is regarded as a French puppet, but the Arab-Asian reaction might be more favorable than in the Korean case if the victim were Burma, which has followed a policy of non-involvement. If the five powers took any countermeasures without UN authorization, world support of their action would be considerably lessened. However, some advocates of a strong line against aggression, such as the Turks, might still wish to contribute.

III. PROBABLE EFFECTS OF THE ACTUAL EXECUTION OF JOINT COUNTERMEASURES

Reaction of the Chinese Communist and Soviet Governments*

13. If the Chinese Communists undertook an identifiable military intervention in Southeast Asia despite a joint warning against such a move, Communist planning unquestionably would have taken into account the likelihood of Western military counteraction. The immediate effect of such military counteraction would almost certainly be to accelerate Chinese Communist military operations.

* SE-20: "The Probable Consequences of Certain Possible US Courses of Action with Respect to Communist China and Korea," treats the material discussed in this section in more detail.

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The Chinese Communists would probably expand their campaign to other parts of Southeast Asia and, having already accepted the danger of expanded hostilities, they might well intensify operations in Korea and seize Hong Kong and Macao. Highest priority would be given, however, to the air defense of Communist China.

14. Chinese Communist defiance of a joint warning would almost certainly involve the prior consent of the USSR, and the USSR could be expected to attempt to provide sufficient aid to insure the success of Peiping's military operations. This aid would probably include increasing commitment of Soviet air defense elements in Communist China and other areas of conflict and might be accompanied by diversionary threats in other parts of Asia, the Middle East and Europe. If the Communists found that such measures were proving unsuccessful in countering the five powers effort, the USSR would probably intensify its aid. This aid might well include the introduction of "volunteer" forces. It might even include the employment of Soviet forces to such an extent that a de facto war between the five powers and the USSR would exist in the Far East. If, however, the global interests of the USSR would be served by disengagement, the Kremlin would probably endeavor to end the conflict by political negotiations.

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Reactions in Indochina, Burma, and Thailand

15. The initial reaction in Indochina, Burma, and Thailand to identifiable Chinese Communist military intervention in any of those countries and to Western military countermeasures would be one of dismay at the prospect either of suffering Chinese Communist conquest or of suffering devastation like that in Korea. The conduct of these peoples and governments would depend upon their estimate of the probable outcome of the conflict between the Western Powers and Communist China and of the havoc that might be wrought locally meanwhile. If military counteraction by the five powers included naval blockade and the conventional bombing of targets in Communist China, reaction in any of three countries attacked would probably be generally favorable, provided blockade and bombardment were added to, rather than substituted for, effective countermeasures at the point of attack. If atomic weapons were used there would be at least initially a widespread revulsion against the five powers.

Reactions of other Asian nations

16. Sentiment in South Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines would generally support from the outset vigorous military countermeasures

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against Communist China. If operations were to be conducted from Japanese bases, ~~because~~ popular apprehension over the possible invocation of the Sino-Soviet pact might weaken the government's position and limit popular support until the effectiveness of the operations was assured. In Indonesia and India there would probably be passive acceptance of local military counteraction to repel the Chinese Communist aggression, although there would be some tendency to regard the war as a conflict of rival aggressive imperialisms. The Indian attitude would be more favorable to Western counteraction if the object of Chinese Communist aggression were Burma rather than Indochina. At least initially India and Indonesia would be opposed to military counteraction against China itself.

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